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DUSTING OFF A DOCUMENT

Mary Garvin, SNJM

On the top shelf of the bookcase lies a dust covered document, a paper full of potential now seemingly forgotten, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society." Like many Church documents focused on justice, this decree shows strength of vision but weakness in practice and assessment.

"So what's going on at Gonzaga, has the situation of women in church and society changed?" Yes, certainly! "As a result of this document?" I'm not so sure.

In 1995, two historic events occurred: the Jesuits' 34th General Congregation in Rome produced a document on women and the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing produced a platform for action. Both documents share a fundamental assumption that gender justice is critical for development and peace of every nation.

For the last ten years at Gonzaga University we have engaged issues related to both documents with debates and dialogues, mobilizing resources and generous sharing for disaster relief and raising controversial issues: sexual ethics, Iraq war, politics, poverty, peace and power. Also our major administration has changed, building projects abound, growth enrollment stretches classroom space and our famous men's basketball team draws Zag fans from the entire country. And we have celebrated 50 years of women at Gonzaga!

But relating local and global issues to women's situation remains marginal except for a dedicated few. For example, our controversial performances of *The Vagina Monologues* illustrated the gap between the theory and the practice of the Jesuit document on women. Ironically if one considered this cultural drama an expression of women's experience—violence against women and women's hopes and desires—the play could provide a significant application of a key strategy of the Jesuit document, "to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women"—all of it. Not sanitized experience—edited, controlled, conforming to church teaching, not pleasant, not comfortable. But the truth. Clarifying the conflict and building reconciling relationships takes courage, which may be the credibility test for this decree.

Though the Jesuit document has gathered dust, it is still preserved on the shelf. A growing grassroots consciousness of gender justice on our campus shows signs of life in the face of globalization and local neglect.

- We have incorporated a social justice requirement in our core curriculum.
- A student based initiative, "Take Back the Night" raises awareness of sexual assault and provides support and resources for victims.
- Our women's studies concentration draws committed faculty members for creative inter-disciplinary classes.
- CCASL (Center for Community Action and Service Learning) currently emphasizes trafficking in women and children as its social justice focus, mobilizing resources for education and action.
- "Church in the 3rd Millennium," a successful ongoing lecture series, initiated by a collaborative group of Jesuits, lay women and men from the university and Spokane has brought outstanding speakers to campus, including a number of women scholars and activists raising consciousness of women and culture, violence, sexuality, and church.

And the spirit of the *magis* hovers over us all, inspiring us to do better. We can develop more just and right relationships among Jesuits and laity, we can generate more reflection on our daily practices, more accountability, and more celebration of our accomplishments. ■

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WE WERE PIONEERS

Patrick Howell, S. J.

We have a proud heritage at Seattle University since we were the first Jesuit university in the world to include women as a regular part of the student body. The exploits of Fr.

James B. McGoldrick S.J., dean, to accomplish this feat are legendary. In 1931 he admitted women to "night classes," which started at noon. Jesuit superiors in Rome wrote back an *admonitum* or a warning forbidding the mixing of genders. Fr. McGoldrick responded, "Fine, I'll send the men home since they have plenty of opportunities."

You can probably still hear the gasps across the Tiber in Rome, but Jesuit superiors settled on a compromise: "You can admit the women to regular classes after lunch." That was just fine for Fr. McGoldrick. He then moved the "lunch period" up to 9 a.m. in the morning and, thereafter, proceeded on his merry way with "inclusive" classes.